

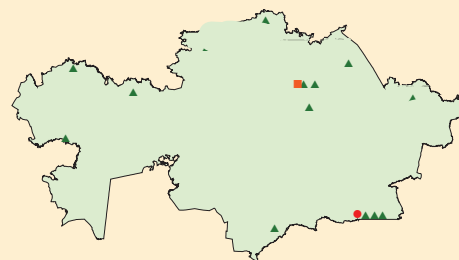
Spotlight Country: Kazakhstan

DEMOGRAPHICS

Geographic area: 2,699,700 sq. km.
Population: 17,289,111 (2014)
Below 24 yrs. old: 42%
Refugee population: 633
Urban population: 53.2%
GDP/capita: \$10,508
Unemployment: 5.1%
Below poverty line: 2.8%

COMMUNICATIONS AND LITERACY

FH Media Freedom: Not Free
Internet users/100 people: 55 (2014)
Mobile phones/100 people: 172 (2014)
Literacy: 100%
Avg. years of education: Females: 15 (2015)
Males: 15 (2015)

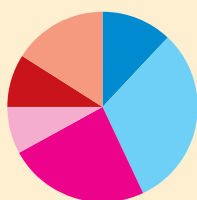


PUBLIC DIPLOMACY SPENDING

D&CP Total FY13 Actual: \$1,728,773 FY14 Actual: \$1,956,091 FY15 Actual: \$2,889,127
Total Reported FY13 Actual: \$8,267,234 FY14 Actual: \$3,964,445 FY15 Actual: \$3,365,259

(Total reported funding for FY13, FY14, and FY15 cannot be compared directly due to delays in reporting from long program cycles.)

D&CP PD Spending by Theme



Piechart Key: PD Spending by Theme

Culture Education Economics Science Military CVE
Democracy Civil Society Women Youth Religious Other

D&CP Spending by Activity

Educational Initiatives (not including English Language programs) \$650,105
Post-Generated Exchanges \$471,254
Support for Mission Initiatives \$441,537
Media/Press Activities \$356,557
Supplementing Bureau of Public Affairs Programs \$206,700

Map Key

Embassy Consulate
American Space

RECOMMENDATIONS:

INCREASE BASE BUDGET: In addition to the \$1.5 million it receives for local public diplomacy activities, Public Affairs Section (PAS) Kazakhstan facilitates an additional \$1.3 million of funding for regional activities. We recommend an increase of \$700,000 to \$2.2 million in its base budget in order to focus on strengthening ties with critical Kazakhstani populations. We also recommend an increase in the amount of local public diplomacy professionals serving in PAS Kazakhstan, especially in Almaty where locally employed staff levels have not changed since 2008.

CONTINUE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS: PAS Kazakhstan has a sound strategic planning process where staff identifies major U.S. foreign policy goals and themes that would resonate with target audiences and then aligns various public diplomacy informational, educational and cultural tools to connect with the audiences. The “One Victory” campaign in 2015 was especially innovative and effective. The “25 Years Together” campaign has built on that success and expanded to incorporate almost every program PAS Kazakhstan carries out in 2016. This campaign approach to building relationships with local audiences should be a model for other public diplomacy missions abroad.

MODIFY FULBRIGHT PROGRAMS FOR KAZAKHSTAN:

Due to the Kazakhstani government's Bolashak program, which funds the study of Kazakhstani students to the United States, the Fulbright Foreign Students program in Kazakhstan adds less value than in other countries. PAS Kazakhstan has two slots for Kazakhstanis on the Fulbright Foreign Students program, while Bolashak sends hundreds of students each year. Recruiting for the two slots, however, takes a considerable amount of resources from the PAS with questionable comparative return. We therefore recommend suspending the Fulbright Foreign Student program for Kazakhstanis and concentrating on additional Fulbright Visiting Scholars who can help develop research-based partnerships between U.S. and Kazakhstani universities.

DESIGNATE TWO PRIORITY AMERICAN SPACES FOR KAZAKHSTAN:

Kazakhstan is the hub within Central Asia and its two main cities have very different target audiences: Almaty is the cultural and commercial center; Astana is the governmental center. Youth in both cities matter for different strategic reasons, both of which have an effect on U.S. policy in the region. We recommend that there be two priority spaces so that youth and civil society leaders in Astana can benefit from the same level of interaction with the United States as cultural and economic leaders in Almaty.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE U.S.-CENTRAL ASIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION (CAEF): Almaty hosts 48 students from across Central Asia studying on U.S.-funded university scholarships, which are facilitated by the U.S.-Central Asia Education Foundation (CAEF) at KIMEP University. The program offers these students a U.S.-style education at a fraction of the cost of a U.S.-based exchange program. Funding is set to run out after the last group of Enterprise Fellows begins their undergraduate studies in the fall of 2017. We recommend identifying additional funding outside of the PAS budget to continue enrolling CAEF fellows from the five Central Asian Republics at CAEF's operating cost of \$1.7 million per year.

OVERVIEW

While the U.S. relationship with Kazakhstan, which borders Russia and China, is strong, the mission has faced serious challenges in simultaneously trying to counter negative influence from the Kremlin and violent extremism encouraged by Daesh. The Public Affairs Sections in Astana and Almaty strengthened the bilateral relationship while also addressing regional and global issues related to fighting terrorism, climate change and narcotics trafficking. Engaging with the Kazakhstani public and expanding the space for civil society are core priorities for the U.S. mission's integrated country strategy and educational, informational and cultural programs are incorporated into nearly every foreign policy objective. The environment in Kazakhstan is rich and diverse for U.S. public diplomacy activities in order to keep the local population open to the United States and U.S. foreign policy.

We found strategically minded public diplomacy leadership in both Astana and Almaty, who drive programs and information activities using a model campaign approach. However, PAS Kazakhstan needs more resources. It received \$2.8 million in fiscal year 2015, yet just \$1.5 million was for bilateral public diplomacy activities. The remaining \$1.3 million was for regional activities run through the U.S. mission. The Public Affairs Sections often have to facilitate regional programs throughout Central Asia. For instance, the U.S. consulate in Almaty is the host to regional political and economic conferences, as well as programs for Central Asian and Afghan students, putting a considerable strain on the local staff. If the United States is going to support generational goals of building press freedoms, civil society, countering violent extremism and building a more solid connection with the West, then the funding stream needs to be more sustainable.

BUDGET AND SPENDING

The base budget for the U.S. mission in Kazakhstan is \$1.5 million. Yet, an additional \$1.3 million of the money is

spent on regional projects and is not entirely absorbed in country. Almaty is a regional hub for Central Asia and the consulate there must manage various policy priorities, all of which have a public diplomacy focus. Given its regional leadership in Central Asia, we strongly encourage an increase in the base budget for Kazakhstan to at least \$2.2 million. This budget increase would increase in the local staff in the Public Affairs Sections, especially in Almaty, which is a hotbed of educational, cultural, press, social media and civil society outreach activity despite the staffing levels not changing for nearly a decade.

STRENGTHENING HIGHER EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN AND ACADEMIC EXCHANGES IN INNOVATIVE WAYS

A major objective of the U.S. mission is to improve the Kazakhstani educational system, specifically through encouraging partnerships between U.S. and Kazakhstani universities; exchange programs; supporting education reform; and supporting English language teachers. A recent survey found that 47.6 percent of Kazakhstani youth want to study abroad. Within that, 29.6 percent wanted to go to Russia, 23.7 percent to the United States, 16.3 percent to the European Union, and 14.6 percent to China. According to Open Doors Data, in the 2014–2015 school year, 2,017 Kazakhstani students studied in the United States, a slight 0.2 percent increase from the previous year. Of them, 359 Kazakhstani students enrolled in graduate programs and the rest are pursuing undergraduate degrees. The majority of the students travel to California, Texas, Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania. Almaty is now a hub for American students studying Russian and Kazakh languages, since several U.S.-funded language programs relocated to Kazakhstan from Russia. Over the course of the academic year, more than 60 American students study in Almaty through U.S. programs.

Almaty is also home to the U.S.-Central Asia Education Foundation (CAEF) at KIMEP University, which hosts 48 students from across Central Asia studying on U.S.-funded university scholarships. CAEF facilitates this program that offers students, known as Enterprise Fellows, a U.S.-style education at a fraction of the cost of a U.S.-based exchange program. In addition, 47 students are enrolled through CAEF at Bishkek's American University of Central Asia (AUCA), although students from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are banned by their respective governments from studying at AUCA. The program began nine years ago with a \$15.7 million dollar U.S. government grant and has 67 alumni thus far from Kazakhstan (22), Kyrgyzstan (8), Uzbekistan (7), Tajikistan (9) and Turkmenistan (21). However, the funding is set to run out after the last group of Enterprise Fellows begins their undergraduate studies in fall 2017. The program has produced exemplary graduates who have made an impact across Central Asia and maintained strong ties with U.S. institutions. We recommend identifying additional funding outside of the PAS budget

to continue enrolling CAEF follows from the five Central Asian Republics at CAEF's operating cost of \$1.7 million per year.

In addition, the Kazakhstani government has put a premium on sending students abroad for a college education as long as they return home. This Bolashak program, the Center for International Programs, has sent hundreds of students to the United States and Europe in the last few years. Within this context, the Fulbright foreign student program, which sends two students per year to the United States, requires considerable staff time within the PAS to manage. However, the program does not seem to be relevant within the Kazakh context and has comparably less impact. We believe that the Fulbright Foreign Student program should be suspended in Kazakhstan and that the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau should instead concentrate on sending additional Fulbright Visiting Scholars who can help develop research-based partnerships between U.S. and Kazakhstani universities.

BEST PRACTICE: APPLYING STRATEGIC CAMPAIGN APPROACHES TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

PAS Kazakhstan has worked to identify key themes that resonate with Kazakhstani audiences, and then work actively to make sure they align the right tools to convey those messages. The 70th Anniversary of the end of World War II was a prime opportunity to convey a history of U.S.-Kazakhstani coordination and partnership, which the mission planned for well in advance. The mission also delivered a comprehensive campaign to promote the 25th anniversary of bilateral relations with Kazakhstan. The campaigns worked not just to strengthen bilateral ties but also reverse misperceptions about the United States.

PAS coordinated with their interagency colleagues to ensure the campaigns highlighted security, economic, health and people-to-people ties. The yearlong "25 Years Together" campaign employed a comprehensive set of public diplomacy tools that resonated with Kazakhstani audiences. Organized according to strategic themes, the campaign included programs to highlight innovation, friendship and partnership. "Innovation" featured a Tech-Women delegation, Maker Space forum, and TechCamp, in addition to business training for Kazakhstani young professionals in the United States. "Friendship" featured an American filmmaker who taught young Kazakhstani directors how to tell Kazakhstan's independent story through documentary film; a youth sports exchange with the Muhammad Ali Center in Kentucky that featured best practices on countering violent extremism; and cultural collaborations between Kazakhstanis and Americans that resonated strongly within a society that sometimes feels isolated from the West. The mission combined many of these elements into a public festival, USKZ Fest (U.S.-Kazakhstan Fest), which exposed thousand to U.S. messages over the course of the three-day event. "Partnership" included panel conversations and forums

to discuss issues of mutual interest for the U.S.-Kazakhstani relationship. The mission used the three-country program of ultra-marathoner Dean Karnazes to link the campaign with neighboring U.S. embassies and highlight U.S. efforts across the region. Each activity was amplified through social media content that went viral on multiple platforms—Facebook, Instagram and Twitter—and empowered youth audiences to create digital content celebrating the U.S.-Kazakhstani relationship.

CREATING TWO PRIORITY AMERICAN SPACES

Almaty: The IIP-designated priority American Space in Kazakhstan is in Almaty, which is the commercial and cultural hub. It opened in November 2013 within the Begalin State Children's Library and was designed with a grant from IIP's American Spaces Office, in addition to pro bono services by an American architect and corporate donations from Steelcase Company and Chevron. It included a Maker Space, which encouraged innovation and collaboration through 3D printers, robotics, micro-controllers, build it yourself computers and science and inventors' kits. The space directly intersected with the Integrated Country Strategy, which included goals to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship. Makers Space programs ranged from how to use a 3D printer to DIY Science to primary science courses. Other American Corner programs included English classes and EducationUSA preparatory classes, in addition to informational programs about Fulbright and other exchanges. Cultural activities, celebrating Jazz History, Earth Day and Toastmasters were also popular. Visitor levels increased considerably over the course of two years: In November 2013, there were 650 visitors and 32 programs; by March 2016, there were 3,510 visitors and 55 programs. The mission is now in the process of moving the American Corner, due to renovation plans at the Begalin Library. IIP has approved PAS' plans to move the American Corner to Almaty Towers, a premiere downtown co-working space and technology hub, where it will be more accessible and attractive to various entrepreneurs, technology professionals and youth in the city.

Astana: The capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, has an American Corner in a local university, which also has a maker space and a robust program schedule that attracts consistently large audiences. However, it is not a designated priority space. Seeing first-hand its potential, we believe an increase in resources for an additional priority space in Astana is important. Youth in both cities matter for different strategic reasons, both of which have an effect on U.S. policy in the region. The youth in Astana are closer to the border with Russia, and are more likely to be future governmental and civil society leaders. We recommend a second priority space within the country so that youth and young professionals in Astana can benefit from the same level of interaction with the United States as cultural and economic leaders in Almaty.

Another core mission goal is to improve the Kazakhstani public's access to objective, pluralistic and professional news sources. This means supporting the development of a free press through in-country trainings, especially using the English language, and the use of IVLP and the speaker programs. The mission has recognized that it is Kazakhstani citizens who are the best positioned to respond to disinformation from violent extremists and pro-Russian sources. The mission's strong social media presence that targets Kazakhstanis under the age of 40 with the goal of raising awareness of the U.S. mission's activities¹ has created an affinity network that often identifies disinformation and works proactively to counter it. The embassy's "Diaspora narratives" campaign, which cost \$35,000, has been one strategy to strengthen ties with this network. The campaign deployed Kazakhstan's most popular blogger and an independent filmmaker to the United States, where he and his team captured compelling stories of Kazakhstanis living in the United States. Each resulting story and video has racked up hundreds of thousands of views. Beyond this program, PAS has cultivated strong relationships with Kazakhstan's creative community, which has helped them to create and deliver compelling content to share with Kazakhstani audiences.

The Kazakh news media is heavily influenced by Russia. Russia-affiliated Channel One Eurasia has considerable influence on segments of the population as Kazakhstan's top network and the local news media often repeats Russian-language content. The Kazakhstani public has often pushed back at Russian disinformation through social media, including disinformation from Channel One. While there is relatively more media freedom in the country than the rest of the Central Asia region, PAS

Kazakhstan is actively working to improve those freedoms and expand the capacity for investigative reporting and critical thinking. The PAS's journalism tradecraft training for journalists included a one-time exchange program to build ties between Kazakh and American journalists and expose them to U.S. news media transparency practices at a considerably low cost. Six journalists spent almost 6 weeks in the United States. The Press and Public Diplomacy Office in the Bureau of South and Central Asia also funded one Knight Fellow for fiscal year 2015 to be based in Astana and provide training for journalists in other Central Asian Countries. In addition, PAS has assisted courses for 35 journalists in Astana and Almaty in intermediate English, using Economic Support Funds. They focus on journalists who already have an intermediate level of English and need to be able to use it professionally.

The U.S. mission in Kazakhstan's biggest concern with these programs is the limit and uncertainty of funding. Until fiscal year 2016 they had no ESF funds for media. In fiscal year 2016 they had \$149,000 and expect to have \$300,000 in fiscal year 2017. But when one Knight Fellow costs \$200,000 and a tiny one-off exchange program is \$100,000, the funding does not go far. An increase in ESF funding for fiscal years 2017 and 2018 to \$750,000 per year would fund an exchange program for two or three years, create a pipeline of Knight Fellows or other training programs in Kazakhstan and make a visible difference in the quality of the Kazakhstani news media.

¹ As of April, the PAS Almaty Facebook page, which is in Kazakh, Russian and English, has 59,500 fans and reaches an average of 500,000 people per week with its content. Its Twitter handle has 5,100 subscribers and has an average retweet of 9 times a day. Its Instagram page has 2,016 followers and is targeted mainly toward youth.